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AUTHOR Dickinson, C. Gordon
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ABSTRACT

The role of Colorado community colleges in preparing people for a more productive role in society is discussed by a representative of the Colorado State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education. The following problems are identified: the increasing costs of providing quality education, and financial problems within the state's rural communities. The following recommendations are offered: a public commitment to the pursuit of excellence in education is needed; education should be a cooperative effort among schools, the community, and business and industry; changes in education should be undertaken to keep pace with technology; and student leadership development activities should be emphasized as an integral part of training programs. It is noted that over 10,000 students enrolled in vocational education programs receive part of their training in schools and part in on-the-job training in industry. In some cases, business and industry provide training equipment to educational programs. In addition, Colorado has occupational training programs jointly funded by the state, federal government, and private industry. (SW)

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PRESENTATION TO

COMMISSION ON EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

By

C. Gordon Dickinson
Chairman
Colorado State Board for Community Colleges
and Occupational Education

"Education for a Productive Role in a Productive Society"

September 16, 1982

HE 016 811

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I am Gordon Dickinson, Chairman of the Colorado State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you on the topic of "Education for a Productive Role in a Productive Society." I certainly feel that community colleges and vocational education training programs should and do have this very theme as one of their priorities.

Community college education in this state is operated through eight state system and four local district community/junior colleges, with a headcount enrollment of 40,000 students - approximately 25 percent of all college enrollments in the state. Over half of the students are enrolled in one of more than 350 occupational education programs. The public delivery system for vocational education in Colorado includes, in addition to the community/junior colleges, seven state supported area vocational schools and 181 local school districts. Secondary and post-secondary enrollments in vocational education will total approximately 100,000 in 1983. The board also has the responsibility for the Colorado Private Vocational School legislation which provides for training in 93 proprietary schools.

The SBCCOE is concerned about excellence in education at all levels and we are particularly concerned about how to provide leadership for the schools and delivery systems we administer in educating the people of Colorado for a more productive role in a very dynamic productive society.

We find ourselves in a time which has been described as an era of "high technology." I am personally involved in the farming business, and I have little doubt that the mini-computer and the micro-processor will become tools which are as necessary in the operation and management of a successful farm business of the future, as the tractor, the plow, and the planter.

We no longer can prepare draftsmen with parallel rulers and the compass or even the sophisticated drafting machines of the past. Computerized drafting is the way it's done in industry today--and there are many other examples of changes in the work place brought about by advancing technology.

Colorado still has many small rural secondary schools, several relatively small community colleges, and even some small four-year colleges. The schools are the backbone of these rural communities and will undoubtedly continue to exist as the educational and cultural centers of these communities. How are we to provide for excellence in education - to prepare people for a more productive role in society when the costs of providing quality education continue to increase at a rate that exceeds the ability of people to pay for it?

Private business and industry have been strong supporters of education in this state and I believe they will continue to do so. Advisory groups from business and industry with whom we work, have told us they understand the difficulty that the schools are having in preparing students for high technology occupations. The equipment which the schools use is approaching obsolescense and the physical facilities cannot be kept on the same high standards with private industry. However, industry must either

depend on the schools or do the training themselves. The cost will eventually be paid by the consumer. I don't think we can afford to pay for two educational systems.

The rural communities of the state are falling behind faster than the urban centers. In general, the rural communities are supported largely by agriculture which is plagued with high costs and low prices. The recent expansion of the energy production industries and related businesses in some rural areas of the state, particularly on the western slope, has given cause for hope in those areas. The urban centers which attract new economic development have a better chance of staying current. But whether in rural Colorado or urban Denver, education must compete with a large number of other programs which are necessary to address social problems, particularly the problems which seem to accompany rapid population growth and economic development. Schools have not always been able to get a large enough share of the available funds to provide for "Excellence in Education."

What can we do to address the above problems?

1. We must be ready and willing to make public commitment to the pursuit of excellence in education. Secretary Bell has taken an important step in the establishment of the National Commission. But the National Commission cannot bring excellence to education in the United States. There must be a commitment from parents, teachers, school administrators, school boards, government at all levels and especially from the general public including private business and industry. The commitment to quality in education must be felt in all levels and all kinds of education starting at the kindergarten level and extending through adult.

   How do we obtain such commitment? Financial commitment is important and necessary, but it will not solve the problem by itself. We must speak about quality, write about it, encourage our best young people into the education field as teachers and administrators, provide moral as well as financial support, be willing to give our time and energy on advisory councils, accountability committees, etc. We must demonstrate to students, parents, teachers, and administrators that we'll help but we'll accept nothing less than excellence--can afford nothing less. Elected officials must share this commitment and public policy must reflect it.

2. Education must become a cooperative effort. The school, community, parents, students, and teachers cannot succeed without the support of the lay public and especially private business and industry. Excellence in education will be obtained only when education becomes a joint responsibility of the schools and the business and industrial community. The preparation of students for a more "productive role in a productive society" is too important to be left to the schools alone. Education is the business of all segments of our society.

   We have made significant improvements in cooperating with business and industry in improving the quality of education for students in both academic and occupational areas. In Colorado, we have more than

10,000 students enrolled in vocational education programs who receive part of their training in the schools and part in on-the-job training in industry. This is a very successful effort which is being expanded every year and should continue to be emphasized. The students see the skills they are being taught as real and valuable.

In other instances, business and industry is providing training equipment to educational programs. The "adopt-a-school" concept could be broadened and include such areas as industry providing part-time instructional staff. Education cannot compete with the salaries of the private sector and if training is to be provided by quality instructors, such arrangements must become commonplace. At the same time, education can be more responsive in providing upgrading and retraining as economic changes occur and effect business and industry.

Colorado presently has approximately 35 occupational training programs which have been jointly funded by the SBCCOE, the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act, through the Private Industry councils, and private industry. These programs have been designed to prepare employees in the energy producing industries in high technology disciplines. Through inter-agency agreements, such as this, limited resources can be pooled and the impact is magnified in meeting labor demands. Another example is an experimental program in which Job Service Centers, through the Department of Labor, and Community College and Area Vocational Schools job placement centers are joining forces in serving the local communities.

3. We must be willing and even aggressive in bringing change in education to keep pace with technology.

   In Colorado, we have put significant resources into a project to provide computer literacy for every vocational education teacher in the state. In the first year, more than 1000 teachers have participated. That's only a beginning as the program will be expanded. Hopefully in the near future, all students who complete a training program will have a basic knowledge of computers and their use in private business and industry.

4. We must continue to emphasize student leadership development activities as an integral part of the training programs. The vocational student organizations have a proven record of success in teaching basic fundamentals of successful employment including loyalty to the employer, dependability, how to get along with fellow workers, good citizenship, and communications. These skills are essential as we consider the total societal role students will be assuming.

I appreciate the opportunity to make this brief statement and wish you success in your efforts to improve the quality of education.

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